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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted at St. Louis Community College (SLCC) to obtain students' opinions of the Clarkson Education Center (CEC), a new off-campus educational center opened in summer, 1984. The study sought information on the students enrolled at CEC and how they differed from the SLCC student body as a whole; students' views of the quality of instruction at CEC and courses that should be offered at the center; the factors influencing student enrollment; students' future plans; and the types of students likely to re-enroll. Questionnaires were distributed in class to all students during the first three semesters of CEC operations (summer and fall, 1984 and spring, 1985). Study findings, based on responses from 1,080 students, included the following: (1) 63% of the respondents had completed some college prior to enrollment, 56% were employed full time, and 76% were enrolled in 3 hours of classes; (2) 53% of the CEC respondents had not previously attended a SLCC facility other than CEC; (3) 95% thought the quality of instruction at CEC was good (35%) or excellent (60%); (4) for 82% of the respondents the convenient location was a very important reason for attending CEC; (5) 45% attended to advance in their present career; (6) 16% of summer students and 47% and 43% respectively of fall and spring students planned to re-enroll the following semester; and (7) the additional courses that the respondents most wished to see at CEC were computer courses, business administration, and college algebra. The study includes a review of the literature. The survey instrument is appended. (HB)

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An Assessment of A New Off-Campus Location

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ABSTRACT

This investigation employed survey research to collect data from students regarding their assessment of a new off-campus education center. Specific concerns of the research were assessment of instruction and other educational services; educational needs of the students; reasons for selecting the center; a demographic profile of those most likely to attend the center; and if the center attracted new enrollments to the main campus. These data, when controlled by semester, will enable the college to improve curriculum planning and develop more effective marketing strategies. Also discussed are problems associated with this type of research and suggestions for future investigations.

INTRODUCTION:

In recent years off-campus educational centers have taken on added significance, as colleges have tried to increase their accessibility. St. Louis Community College (SLCC) currently offers courses at over 50 off-campus sites.

The westward expansion of population which began in the St. Louis area in 1950 has continued into the 1980's. In order to more effectively serve its constitutents SLCC made the decision to open a west county educational center. The center was opened in time for the Summer 1984 semester and was named the Clarkson Education Center (CEC).

Several preliminary investigations were conducted before the educational center began operation. First, an environmental scan of selected zipcodes in western St. Louis County was conducted. Census data and official College records were used for this investigation. For each zipcode the key variables included: SLCC draw rates by age category; male/female population breakdown; percentage of individuals 18 and over with no college; percentage of individuals 25 and over with no college; and the percentage of people in various occupational categories (i.e., managerial, clerical, technical, etc).

The second step, site selection, used data from the environmental scan. St. Louis Community College decided to rent space in a major office building in western St. Louis County. By choosing to rent space in an occupied office building, SLCC hoped to attract students from the other tenants in the building.

The third preliminary step involved the development of several committees to recommend course offerings for the new site. The decision was made to initially offer business, popular transfer, and office automation courses.

Once the decision was made to start classes during the Summer semester, institutional research staff met with key administrators to develop a research design to review the new center. Institutional research staff recommended collecting survey data from students at the new center for three consecutive semesters.

This paper will present several perspectives from the literature regarding off-campus centers and why students might select a particular center. A discussion of the research methods and questions will also be given. In addition, key results and their implications for the College will be discussed.

II. PERSPECTIVES FROM THE LITERATURE:

An important point in this project was that research and planning were involved in the process from the inception. Although this linkage is heavily grounded in theory, a large number of organizations tend to conduct research only when the plans have failed.

Uhl (1983) states that effective planning depends on information. The key word in Uhl's statement is INFORMATION, as Uhl recognizes that the conversion from data to information can greatly assist any planning process.

Teeter (1983) has suggested that the institutional research staff can provide the key role in the transformation of data into planning information.

In the current project, SLCC's institutional research staff has provided planning information (based on their research) on a continuing basis. This process has allowed decision-makers to critically review the conceptualization of the center and its operation during the first three semesters.

St. Louis Community College's institutional research staff provided information for this project through an initial environmental scan and by surveying students once they enrolled in the new center.

The environmental scan can play a significant role in the development of a new off-campus center. First, the scan allows the organization to determine if a present and future demand for satellite centers exists. Second, data collected in an environmental scan can assist in the development of an initial curriculum strategy.

The use of survey research in higher education is becoming increasingly more popular (Fuqua, et.al., 1982). Although there are problems associated with survey research (i.e., non-response bias, attitudinal responses only, etc) it does present an effective manner for gathering a large amount of data in a brief period of time.

A major purpose of this project was to determine what factors were important to students when they decided to enroll at the new center. A number of studies have reviewed students' motivation for enrolling in community colleges. Governanti and Clowes (1982) indicated that learning for learning's sake, occupational advancement, and humanitarian concerns were major reasons for student participation. Houle (1961) described three subgroups of students: 1) the goal oriented; 2) the activity oriented; and 3) the learning oriented. Attinasi, et.al., (1982) suggested that

students could be classified according to three motivational orientations: 1) requirement meeters; 2) knowledge seekers; and 3) specific information users.

In addition to various personal, educational, or occupational related reasons for enrolling at an off-campus site, its convenient location could be a primary reason for selecting that particular site. Off-campus locations may attract new students to a college system simply because the college is now more conveniently located to their home or job. Decisions which were made 20-30 years ago regarding the location of major campuses cannot be changed, but off-campus centers can allow the college to increase its geographic accessibility.

III. RESEARCH METHODS:

The decision was made to collect survey data from all credit students who enrolled at the Clarkson Educational Center (CEC). The data collection period consisted of the first three semesters of CEC's operation (Summer and Fall, 1984, and Spring, 1985).

Institutional research staff met with the key decision makers (Vice-Chancellor for Planning & Academic Affairs and the Administrator of CEC) to determine what pieces of information would assist them in the development of a successful center.

Questions were developed to acquire the following types of information: student demographics (age, sex, employment status and educational level); student ratings of the registration and instruction; location of students' homes and jobs; how important various factors were in their decision to enroll at the center; and educational goals.

The questionnaire was pre-tested using a sample of 100 students from another off-campus location. No significant problems existed in the design of the questionnaire, although a question which asked for additional comments from the students was added. (A copy of the final questionnaire is included in Appendix I).

Questionnaires were distributed to students during class, and the students were asked to return them to their instructors before they left the building. This procedure produced fairly high response rates (Summer 79 percent, Fall 70 percent and Spring 66 percent). The declining response rates could be due to students who were enrolled in all three semesters felt the need to return only one survey.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1) What types of students enrolled at CEC?

2) Did the student body profiles of CEC students differ by semester?

3) Was the overall student body profile of CEC students different from the college as a whole?

4) Did CEC attract new* students to the SLCC system?

5) How did CEC students rate the quality of instruction and registration process?

6) What factors were the most important in a student's decision to enroll at CEC?

7) What types of students are most likely to re-enroll at the new center?

8) What additional courses did students think should be offered at CEC?

9) Did CEC students plan to complete career programs or transfer to a four-year school?

V. RESULTS:

The results and subsequent analyses are based on 1,080 respondents who attended the new center in either the Summer, Fall, or Spring semester. All of these respondents represent students who were enrolled in credit courses.

A) Demographic Profile of Students

Sixty percent of the respondents were female and 40 percent were male. These figures are relatively similar to the District's breakdown for the same three semesters. (District-wide: 57 percent, female and 43 percent, male.)

The CEC students were slightly older than the District students. A comparison of CEC to the District by age categories can be found in Table I.

* New Students were defined as those who had not previously attended a SLCC facility.

Table I: Percentage of District and CEC Students by Age Categories

Age Categories	CEC	District
Under 21	27.7	30.0
21 - 25	20.4	25.0
26 - 30	9.7	16.0
31 - 40	21.0	18.0
41 - 50	16.2	8.0
51 - 60	4.7	2.0
Over 60	0.3	1.0
TOTAL:	100.0	100.0

The majority of the CEC students (56 percent) indicated that they were employed during the day on a full-time basis. An additional 18 percent of the students were employed part-time during the day. Six percent of the respondents were working during the evening (three percent full-time and three percent part-time). Approximately 14 percent reported that they were unemployed and were not looking for a job, while five percent said they were unemployed but were seeking employment. (Comparable employment status figures are not collected on a District-wide basis.)

The majority of the CEC students (76 percent) were enrolled in three hours and only six percent were enrolled in more than six hours.

Thirty-six of CEC respondents were not interested in either a career or transfer program. Forty-five percent reported that they planned to transfer to a four-year school and 19 percent want to complete a 2-year career program.

Nearly 63 percent (62.8) of the CEC respondents had completed some college prior to their enrollment. Four percent had already completed an Associate's Degree and nine percent reported having a four-year degree. In addition, five percent of the CEC respondents said they had completed some graduate-level work.

In an attempt to determine if the CEC student profile varied by semester, several crosstabulations were conducted.

A comparison of males and females by semester reveals that the CEC is attracting an increasing number of female students. The percentage of females has grown from 51.6 percent in Summer, 1984 to 58.2 percent for Fall, 1984, and 58.5 percent for Spring, 1985.

The age distribution of CEC students also changed during the first three semesters. The student population for both the Fall and Spring semesters was significantly older than the Summer population. Fifty-eight percent of the Summer students were under 21 years of age, while only 17 percent of the Spring students were in that category. Twenty-six percent of the Spring, 1985 population was 31-40 years of age, while only six percent of the Summer students were 31-40 years of age.

As one might expect, these populations have different educational goals. Sixty-six percent of the Summer students reported that they wanted to transfer to a four-year school and only 13 percent were interested in a career program. Approximately 40 percent of both the Fall and Spring students were interested in transfer courses, while nearly 20 percent of both groups planned to achieve a degree in a career program.

B) Did CEC Attract New Students to St. Louis Community College

Fifty-three percent of the total respondents (N=1080) indicated that they had not previously attended a SLCC facility other than CEC. Although one cannot conclude that these students would not have attended another SLCC site, it must be recognized that the new center was the first SLCC site they chose.

A new student profile was generated for each semester. The new student distribution by sex for the Summer term was fairly even -- 48 percent female and 52 percent, male. The sex distribution for the Fall and Spring semesters was not quite so even as 58 percent of new students in the Fall were female and 71 percent of the new Spring students were female.

The age distributions of the new students for the Fall and Spring semesters were relatively similar, although the new Spring students were slightly older. The new students in the Summer term were significantly younger than either the Fall or Spring students. (See Table II for a complete distribution by semester.)

Table II - Percent of New Students by Age Category for Each Semester

	Summer	Fall	Spring
Under 21	63.6	26.7	18.4
21 - 25	17.0	13.3	15.1
26 - 30	3.9	8.8	10.8
31 - 40	3.9	25.4	25.0
41 - 50	9.3	18.8	23.6
51 - 60	2.3	6.7	7.1
Over 60	0.0	0.3	0.0
Total:	100.0	100.0	100.0

A review of new students' educational profiles revealed that Spring and Fall students were slightly more likely to already have completed a four-year degree.

An analysis of the employment status of the new students by semester revealed that most, regardless of semester, were employed full-time during the day. (Summer 50 percent, Fall 52 percent, and Spring 59 percent.)

C) How Did CEC Students Rate the Registration and Instructional Processes

In general, most of the CEC respondents (62 percent) rate the registration process as excellent. An additional 34 percent thought the registration was good, and only four percent reported the process as poor.

The majority of the students (80 percent) registered at either CEC (46 percent) or at another SLCC facility (34 percent). Seven percent registered by mail and 13 percent indicated that they registered by telephone.

Ninety-five percent of the respondents thought the quality of instruction was either excellent (60 percent) or good (35 percent). Only five percent rated the instructional process as poor. There were no significant differences among the ratings by age, sex, employment status, educational profile or semester enrolled.

D) Why Did Students Enroll at CEC

Students select a campus for a variety of reasons. In an attempt to determine what factors were important in a student's decision to enroll at CEC, students were asked to rate (very, somewhat, or not important) several factors.

The three reasons which students rated as the most important in their decision to enroll at CEC were: Convenient Location, 82 percent -- very important; Personal Interest -- 46 percent, very important; and To Advance My Present Career -- 45 percent, very important.A complete list of the reasons for attending and their ratings can be found in Table III.

Table III: Percent Ratings of Reason for Attending CEC: All Respondents

REASON	VERY IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	NOT IMPORTANT	TOTAL
Convenient Location	81.9	14.3	3.8	100.0
Cost	39.7	38.5	21.8	100.0
To Advance My Present Career	45.2	26.8	28.0	100.0
To Develop A New Career	36.0	31.3	32.7	100.0
Personal Interest	45.8	38.3	15.9	100.0
I Like The New Facility	35.3	33.1	31.6	100.0

In addition, respondents were asked to select the one most important reason they chose CEC. The majority of the respondents, 66 percent, reported that convenient location was the one most important reason for enrolling. Fifteen percent gave advancement of a present career as their one most important reason. Personal interest was reported by nine percent of the respondents as the most important reason, and eight percent thought new career development was the most important. One percent of the respondents gave cost as the one most important reason, and one percent also reported preference for the new facility as the most important.

Respondents' most important responses were analyzed according to semester, age, and sex.

For all three semesters, convenient location was given most frequently as the one most important reason. However, the percentage of respondents selecting this reason has declined over the three semesters. (Summer, 76 percent - Convenient Location; Fall, 66 percent - Convenient Location; and Spring, 59 percent - Convenient Location.)

This decline has been accompanied by increases in percentage of respondents reporting career development, career advancement, and personal interest as the one most important reason. The changes in the top four most important reasons over time are presented in Table IV. (Cost and Preference for the new facility were not included due to the fact that they were rarely selected as the one most important reason.

Table IV: Changes in Most Important Reasons Over Time

	SUMMER	FALL	SPRING
Convenient Location	76.3	66.0	58.8
Personal Interest	6.4	8.1	11.1
Present Career Advancement	11.9	14.9	16.5
New Career Development	3.2	9.2	10.8
Total:	97.8	98.2	97.2

An analysis of the most important reasons by sex revealed that females tended to see convenient location as more important (69.2%, Females and 60.5% Males, chose this as the most important reason). Males were more likely to give advancement of present career as the one most important reason more often than females (Males, 18.6% and Females, 12.3%).

For all age categories, convenient location was given most frequently as the one most important reason. A review of the other most important reasons by age category revealed the following:

1) Advancement of present career was an important concern for respondents who were either 26-30 years of age or 31-40 years of age;

2) The development of a new career was especially important for respondents who were 31-40 years of age; and

3) Personal interest was more important for students who were 51-60 years of age.

E) What Types of Students Might Return to CEC

When Summer students were asked if they planned to return to CEC for the next semester, only 16 percent said they would. However, it should be noted that a majority of the Summer respondents were under 21 years of age and interested in transfer courses; these students probably attend a four-year school during the Fall semester.

An analysis of the Fall and Spring students revealed that 47 and 43 percent respectively planned to enroll the following semester. The Fall and Spring students who indicted that they planned to enroll at Clarkson the next semester were most likely to be: female; either 31-40 or 41-50 years of age; employed full time, during the day; already have some college; and do not plan to transfer to a four-year school or complete a career program.

F) What Additional Courses Would Students Like at CEC

Respondents were asked to name courses that they would like offered at CEC. Not all respondents provided answers to this question; however, for those who did (37 percent) the ten courses mentioned the most often were: 1) Computer courses; 2) Business Administration; 3) College Algebra; 4) Accounting; 5) History; 6) English Composition; 7) Calculus; 8) Economics; 9) Psychology; and 10) Office Skills.

Crosstabulation analysis was conducted in an attempt to determine the top 10 desired courses by semester. These results can be found in Table V.

Table V: The Top Ten Desired Courses by Semester

Ranking	Summer	Fall	Spring
1	Business Adm.	Computer	Business Adm.
2	Computer	Business Adm.	Computer
3	Calculus	Algebra	Algebra
4	Fitness	English Comp.	Accounting
5	Algebra	Economics	Calculus
6	History	Accounting	Office Skills
7	Engineering	History	Real estate
8	English Comp.	Calculus	Art
9	Accounting	Psychology	Biology
10	Economics	Office Skills	Foreign Language

VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

This report has presented a model for the assessment of a new off-campus center. The first step of this model consisted of an environmental scan of the proposed service area. Data from the scan was employed to determine if a demand for the new center existed.

The second step of the model used survey research to gather information from the new center's students. Based on an analysis of the survey data, several key recommendations for the new center can be made.

1) Educational Goal:

The educational goal of CEC students varied by semester. Students who enrolled during the Summer semester were more interested in taking courses that would transfer to a four-year school.

Although Fall and Spring students were more concerned with career programs than Summer students, the majority of this group was not interested in either a career or transfer program. In addition, the reasons for enrolling of career advancement and career development received the highest ratings by Fall and Spring students.

Based on this information, the College should place a heavy emphasis on transfer courses for the Summer curricula. The College should also recognize that a large portion of Fall and Spring students at CEC may be interested in a selected number of courses (Data Processing, Business Administration, and Math) that can improve their careers.

2) Demographic Profile:

The Summer students were most likly to be less than 21 years of age, have some college, and work during the day. The distribution of males and females was fairly even.

Fall and Spring students were likely to be female, between the ages of 30 and 50, have some college, and work full-time during the day.

These profiles also appear to represent the types of students who might enroll in future Summer, Fall and Spring semesters. College marketing efforts should recognize these profiles and target those groups most likely to enroll.

3) Quality of Registration and Instruction:

The administration of the new center should feel confident that the students are pleased with both the quality of instruction and the registration process. Efforts should be made to continue the high quality of these services.

4) What Attracted the Students to CEC:

For all three semesters, convenient location was the most important reason that students selected CEC. Other important reasons for enrolling at CEC were: to advance a present career; to develop a new career; and for personal interest.

Convenient location, although an important reason for all groups, was more important to females than males. The career advancement and development reasons were more important to males. The personal interest reasons were more important to people over 40 years of age, specifically those 51-60.

5) Problems Associated With the Research:

One problem associated with this research was that it collected data only from those students who were enrolled at CEC. For example, if a student had a terrible experience during registration or was very dissatisfied with a course and decided not to enroll or to drop the course, this person would not be surveyed.

A second problem was that students were forced to give fairly standard answers. Although opportunities for additional comments were provided, most students did not give any comments. In the future, a series of focus groups (based on data from this project) might allow the College to acquire more detailed information.

6) Has the Research Been Used:

This project has provided planning data to the director of the new center. This person has indicated that he is pleased with the on-going reports and has used the data, both for planning curriculum and marketing (target mailings) the center.

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Appendix I

ST. LOUIS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

INSTITUTE OF CONTINUING EDUCATION

SURVEY OF SPRING, 1985 ENROLLEES AT THE CLARKSON EDUCATION CENTER

WE ARE INTERESTED IN YOUR OPINIONS REGARDING THE CLARKSON EDUCATIONAL CENTER. PLEASE COMPLETE THE QUESTIONNAIRE AND RETURN IT TO YOUR INSTRUCTOR BEFORE YOU LEAVE THE BUILDING. ALL RESPONSES WILL REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL AND ARE STRICTLY FOR PLANNING PURPOSES. YOUR RESPONSES WILL HELP US SERVE YOU BETTER IN THE FUTURE. IF YOU HAVE ALREADY COMPLETED A QUESTIONNAIRE THIS SEMESTER, PLEASE IGNORE THIS SURVEY. THANK YOU.

---

1. Did you attend St. Louis Community College prior to this semester?

   _____ Yes _____ No

   If yes, did you attend: _____ Meramec _____ Forest Park

   _____ Florissant Valley _____ Clarkson Center

2. Are you working toward a degree/certificate?

   _____ Yes _____ No

   If yes, is the degree/certificate: _____ College Transfer _____ Career Program

3. How many hours are you enrolled in at the Clarkson Center? _____
   (Please skip #3 if you are enrolled in a non-credit course)

4. What additional courses would you like to see offered at the Clarkson Educational Center?

   _____ _____

5. How much education did you complete prior to this semester?

   _____ High School/GED
   _____ Some Technical School
   _____ Associate Degree: Tech School
   _____ Some College
   _____ Associate Degree: College
   _____ 4-year Degree: College
   _____ Graduate Degree/Courses

6. How did you register for this course?

   _____ By Mail
   _____ By Telephone
   _____ At another SLCC campus
   _____ At the Clarkson Center

7. How would you rate the service you received during registration?

   _____ Excellent _____ Average _____ Poor

   If you thought the service was poor, please explain the problem.

   _____

   _____

8. Please rate the following items according to how important they were when you made your decision to enroll at the Clarkson Center.

	VERY IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	NOT IMPORTANT
Convenient Location	_____	_____	_____
Personal Interest	_____	_____	_____
To Advance My Present Career	_____	_____	_____
To Develop A New Career	_____	_____	_____
Cost	_____	_____	_____
I Liked the New Facility	_____	_____	_____

9. Of the items listed in question # 8 please indicate which ONE was the MOST IMPORTANT in your decision to enroll at the Clarkson Center?

_____ Convenient Location

_____ I Like the New Facility

_____ Personal Interest

_____ To Advance My Present Career

_____ To Develop a New Career

_____ Cost

10. Do you plan to enroll at St. Louis Community College next semester? Please answer all that apply.

_____ No, I do not plan to enroll

_____ Yes, at the Clarkson Center

_____ Yes, at Meramec

_____ Yes, at Forest Park

_____ Yes, Florissant Valley

11. Is the Clarkson Center conveniently located to your home?

_____ Yes _____ No

12. How many minutes would it take you to travel from your home to the Clarkson Center?

_____ less than 10 minutes

_____ 10-20 minutes

_____ 21-30 minutes

_____ more than 30 minutes

13. What is your home zipcode? _____

14. Is the Clarkson Center conveniently located to your place of employment?

_____ Yes _____ No _____ Do not work (Skip #15 and #16)

15. How many minutes would it take to travel from your work to the Clarkson Center?

_____ less than 10 minutes _____ 21-30 minutes

_____ 10-20 minutes _____ more than 30 minutes

16. What is your work zipcode? _____ - _____

17. In general, how would you rate the quality of instruction at the Clarkson Center?

_____ Excellent _____ Average _____ Poor

If you thought the quality of instruction was poor, please explain the problem. _____

_____

18. How did you learn about the Clarkson Educational Center?

_____ Signs/Message Boards _____ From a counselor

_____ Clarkson brochure mailed to my home _____ Newspaper Ad

_____ A schedule was mailed to my home _____ Radio Ad

_____ From a Friend Other_____

19. What is your employment status?

_____ Employed Full Time, Day _____ Employed Full Time, Night

_____ Employed Part Time, Day _____ Employed Part Time, Night

_____ Unemployed: Not Seeking _____ Unemployed: Seeking Employment

20. What is your sex? _____ Female _____ Male

21. What is your age? _____ Under 21 _____ 21-25 _____ 26-30

_____31-40 _____41-50 _____51-60 _____ 61 and over

22. Do you have any additional comments? _____

_____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE.

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